

ST. LUCIE TRIBUNE

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THE ABSTRACT BUSINESS

The proposed plan of the county going into the abstract business is a project that is so entirely new—something that has never been tried or attempted—that it is impossible for any man, no matter what his mental calibre, to forecast the actual results.

The scheme has many plausible features, it also has some obstacles that seem almost unsurmountable. It matters not which way our board of county commissioners settle the question, they are liable to make a blunder. It is an innovation, and only the future can decide the wisdom of the course pursued, and our commissioners must act on the matter as it is presented to them.

A newspaper is supposed to be the balance wheel of a community. If it is well conducted it will refrain from jumping into a controversy which has no precedent upon which to base even a single fact. But when it heralds untruthful statements either for or against a proposition it shows its utter inability to faithfully represent the people.

In our first issue we announced that THE TRIBUNE would be a people's paper. This promise has been fulfilled in every issue, and will continue to be fulfilled after the present opposition has ceased to exist. We have not taken sides on the abstract question because we have not felt qualified to foretell the outcome of the innovation. This is our home. We expect to be in business here until we have reached our allotted three score and ten years, and at that time we anticipate turning the business over to our heirs. We do not feel like urging our commissioners in a matter that in future years we may regret, nor will we condemn them for a blunder, if a blunder they make, for they will act in favor of what, at the present time, seems to be for the best interests of the county.

The erratic News has taken a stand in favor of the county's going into the abstract business. While there are many reasons that it could have advanced for its position, it has not yet given one truthful motive. The main ground for the position of the News is that the head of the present abstract company, as attorney for the creditors of the News editor, has been forced to take energetic measures to collect the accounts of his clients, and in doing his duty in this matter has incurred the editor's displeasure. Thinking that it would injure the business of the private company he is in favor of the project, purely (if such a word can be used in connection with anything from that source) to gratify personal and selfish ends, and without a thought as to its advantage to the people of the county.

TO PROCURE SETTLERS.

THE TRIBUNE is sending out each week between fifty and one hundred sample copies to parties in the north and west who are enquiring about the East Coast of Florida. These names are obtained from the transportation offices where people are seeking information of the different parts of Florida and the East Coast in particular, with an intention of spending the winter here or coming to become permanent residents.

Believing that there is no part of Florida so well suited to the needs of the average homeseeker as the East Coast, and especially that part lying between the southern part of Brevard and the northern part of Dade counties, we are using every effort to attract their attention to this territory.

In Brevard, St. Lucie and Dade counties every shade and character of soil necessary for the successful cultivation of all the tropical fruits, vegetables and farm produce can be found, and at prices that will attract many settlers if properly placed before them, and it shall be our desire to compile such information as will be of substantial benefit to those seeking information of this country in each issue of THE TRIBUNE until January 1st.

We shall be grateful to any of our readers who shall assist us in preparing this information, and hope to have those who are qualified with experience

in agricultural or horticultural lines to contribute to our columns.

The great need of our country is more settlers, and with the thousands of acres of the finest lands idle and upon the market at reasonable figures we should secure a large number of homeseekers the coming winter.

It would be well for our real estate agents to have their lists of lands in THE TRIBUNE, as it will go direct to hundreds of people who are looking this way with the idea of finding a suitable location for a home.

LETTERS FROM THE PEOPLE

Articles to be inserted under this head are solicited, but we request all contributors to be brief. THE TRIBUNE is not responsible for any opinion expressed by its correspondents.

Favors the Abstract Plan.

Jensen, Fla., Sept. 25, 1905.

Editors TRIBUNE:

I was an interested reader of the articles in the last issue of THE TRIBUNE on the abstract question, and especially one by "A Large Taxpayer." It seems to me that in making out his case he goes too far and discloses the best of reasons for the county's furnishing the abstracts. For instance, he says that the books owned by the Brevard Abstract of Title Company are "valued at \$5,000." Admitting this to be correct, and taking it for granted that their value, like other property, depends upon the revenue to be derived from them, then how can the county commissioners of St. Lucie county make any better investment than by spending a small sum for a set of abstract books?

It is no argument that the records will have to be transcribed by the clerk, for some one must do it, and experience should teach any of us that the compensation fixed by law for this work is less than a private concern would charge, because the clerk has other duties and compensations and the fees for abstracting would be but a fractional part of his salary.

The argument that the county should not furnish abstracts because but a portion of the people use them will not hold good. For instance: The county is petitioned to lay out a certain road. Shall it be denied because all of the people of the county will not travel it? The reason for such things is that the public have certain rights and among these is the right to feel secure in their property. The better security, as against the individual or company, is the pledge and responsibility of the whole community. The county cannot run away nor take the benefit of the bankruptcy laws.

By all means let the county furnish the abstracts, and if none others have escaped the avaricious maw of the abstract companies, let us herald to the world that St. Lucie county stands unfettered.

ANOTHER LARGE TAXPAYER.

Just Valuation Necessary.

Wabasso, Florida, Sept. 25, 1905.

Editors TRIBUNE:

So much is being said about the abstract question that there is no doubt of one result, that the taxpayers will understand that the money to pay for a county abstract business will all come out of their pockets, but there is another question of vital interest to every property holder in the county, and that is as to the correct valuation of the property subject to taxation. I am persuaded that there are thousands of acres of land in this county, mostly unimproved, which are assessed at a vast undervaluation. I am further persuaded that if these lands were assessed at a fair valuation, that the county would be able to build the court house and jail within the year, without increasing the millage and without a dollar of indebtedness, and there might even be enough left to buy those abstract books.

Let us consider for a moment some of the circumstances existing. Do you know of anyone in your neighborhood who bought land some years ago at from \$1.25 to \$5 an acre? The parties came from Chicago or New York, didn't they? They gave the land in to the assessor at \$1.25 an acre, and it still stands on the books at that figure, year after year. It may be the best land in the neighborhood, and they may never have seen it, but when you tried to buy that land didn't they refuse to accept \$25 an acre for it? What, then, has made it so valuable? Simply that you and other, actual residents, had improved your property, making theirs more desirable.

Is it a just and equitable system of taxation, which throws the burden on the owner who improves his property, makes the county a really desirable place to live in, and increases the value of the non-residents property without his bearing his rightful share of taxes?

Now the above illustration is an actual fact in the writer's observation, and in conversation with other taxpayers they relate the same experience.

I want to say a word or two about how to remedy this evil, for an evil it is, and that of vital import to the residents of the county.

Undoubtedly it is the duty of the tax assessor to see that the proper valuation is put on property for the purposes of taxation. How important, then, it is that we should have a man well versed in the values of orange property, pineapple property, trucking land, etc. to fill that office. I believe that all property should be assessed at its actual value, if placed on the market at the same date. This seems the most just and equal way to determine values, and the assessor must have good judgment to be competent for the work. A tax assessor once called on a new resident for the purpose of assessing his property. On being asked how the county fixed values, the assessor replied that he didn't know. "Well, then," said the resident, "There is the property, here is the description; fix the value accordingly." But the

assessor declared himself unable. Is this right? Should not the tax assessor be thoroughly conversant with the values in his county, and able to fix those values correctly and conservatively? The tax payers themselves are responsible for part of the evil. There is too general a desire to get off from the assessor as light as possible, with the idea that taxes will be lighter. This is not so. It is plain that the higher the valuations, the lower the millage will be to every one. It is every citizen's duty to see that the assessor is rightly informed of all taxable property; and it is the assessor's duty to hunt up the \$25 and \$100 an acre pieces now assessed at \$1.25. If he does not do it, who will?

E. A. HOLT.

The Wharf Controversy.

Jensen, Fla., Sept. 26, 1905.

Editors TRIBUNE:

The action of the county commissioners last week in requesting the attorney general of the state to file an information in chancery against C. S. Schuyler and others, of Jensen, once more opens up the dock question, and, as but one side, so far, seems to have been heard before the tribunal of the people, I would respectfully request space to present the other side.

During the latter part of the year of 1899 several parties engaged in growing beans and vegetables across the Indian river, on the island, interested themselves in building a wharf at Jensen so they could get their produce to the railroad. These gentlemen called themselves the Planters' Wharf association, and circulated a petition to raise money to build a wharf, at the same time praying the board of county commissioners of Brevard county to deed to them the riparian right at the foot of Commercial street in Jensen.

The deed was given by the county and the wharf built. During the storm of last October the dock was practically destroyed, and the bean growers were confronted with the condition that the coming crop would find them without means of getting it to the railroad. No meeting of the original members of the Planters' Wharf association had been held for some time, and some of the original members had left for other states.

Under these circumstances, what was to be done?

Originally, the association was nothing but a few men linked together for a common purpose, without constitution or by-laws to govern their proceedings, and no means of raising money except by voluntary subscription. The bean business was not in a flourishing condition and the few members did not feel like taxing themselves for the cost of a new wharf. Consequently, as the best thing, and at the time, the only means of getting a wharf in time for the bean season, the trustees, viz: Geo. Baker, Geo. E. Coon and C. H. Racey, entered into an agreement with Chas. S. Schuyler, whereby they were to deed him the riparian right, he to build a new wharf and operate it under these restrictions, to wit: To be free to the public, excepting a small wharfage charge for freight passing over the wharf, sufficient to keep it in repair, but not for profit.

This transaction was carried out, and Mr. Schuyler built a magnificent dock, which has since been the pride of every Jensenite. The bean men rejoiced over it, and gladly paid the nominal wharfage charge; everyone was contented and apparently satisfied, until Mr. Schuyler built a fish house, then trouble began. And I want to say right here that there is not a solitary man who sends freight over that dock, and pays wharfage, that has entered a single complaint; but all at once certain individuals who never use the dock, except as a promenade or to hitch their launch to, discovered that a fish house was a nuisance, and that a wharfage charge was an unjust claim against some other man's pocketbook—mind you, nothing had come out of theirs—and asked for an injunction to restrain Mr. Schuyler from charging wharfage and building a fish house, regardless of the fact that it has long been decided in Florida that a fish house is not a nuisance and the fish business a lawful one. The matter came before Judge Jones, who promptly refused the order.

And the queer part of it is that this injunction suit was brought by the county, and now the county commissioners want to burden the taxpayers with the expense of another suit. It would seem that expenses were already high enough, and that the county commissioners had enough on their hands without constituting themselves mere cat's paws to pull chestnuts out of the fire for others who have only a personal or selfish end to serve, by instituting a multiplicity of lawsuits.

But, aside from this, the fish house is a good thing, for it not only brings more men and money to Jensen, but is a source of revenue, thereby lessening the wharfage charges necessary to maintain the dock, and to this extent being a direct benefit to the patrons.

You talk with some of the men who are "egging on" the county commissioners so as to save their own pockets the expense of a lawsuit; that they are trying to prevent the maintenance of an institution worth several hundred dollars yearly to Jensen, and they will hold up their hands in righteous indignation. Why, then, are they so interested in preventing this fishing business, and trying to deprive Mr. Schuyler of his property?

Is this opposition to the fish business because it enters into competition with another fish business here whose owner is one of those "principal property holders" mentioned by the commissioners in their resolution to the attorney general? If not, what is it? We challenge them for their reason.

Arranged against this class of "principal property holders" are other large property holders and every man of Jensen and vicinity who pays wharfage.

Which should the commissioners consult? Which will the court consider? A LARGE PROPERTY HOLDER AND WHARF USER.

Every Day

new goods are arriving at the Big Store. To tell you all about all of them would be an endless task, and a confusing one. We feel obliged to tell you about some of the "good things" in hand, however, and invite you to come and look at the big store and take note of the great variety of up-to-the-minute merchandise we are handling. You are always welcome here.

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